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ABSTRACT

The article discusses the educational situation in Queensland and offers an alternative to the present open education plan. It suggests: that traditional education is appropriate for teaching basic skills, as in specific areas of mathematics where one level of mastery may depend on certain knowledge at a lower level; that curricula which are sequentially or spirally organized may best be directed by employing non-grading; that non-grading requires a set curriculum while open education imposes no such requirement; and that an open approach is appropriate for gaining knowledge that is not basic or unchanging, or that is not sequential. Additionally, the article offers three practical limitations relative to the implementation of the multiple-progress plan; these involve the amount of time and work in compiling a core-curriculum, deciding the proportion of the core-curriculum that will be devoted to non-grading, and dividing the non-graded areas into levels. It is suggested that because small school teachers must work in two or more year levels at the same time, they are perhaps better equipped for this task than teachers from larger schools. (AH)

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# A Multiple-Progress Plan For the Small School?

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M.F. Fogarty

## 1. INTRODUCTION

Though much of what is said in this paper can find support in the literature, it is nevertheless of a philosophical nature with the aim of initiating dialogue with teachers in small schools. The literature in this area is rather sparse and it is hoped that this text will encourage principals and teachers to write about happenings within their small schools with the intention of adding to this scarce literature.

## 2. PROGRESSIVE EDUCATION AND THE SMALL SCHOOL

With regard to education, the 'sixties and the 'seventies will probably be remembered for the innovations that they produced. Many of these were in the field of school organization, e.g. various forms of grouping, non-grading and open education. In the implementation of these, it appears that the small school enjoys certain advantages that are not always evident in the large school.

Small schools are, in reality, multiple-area schools. The one-teacher school is an open teaching space that may be arranged to allow for flexibility in learning and teaching and for the free movement of pupils and teachers. If partitions are folded back in two and three-teacher schools, open spaces that permit flexibility, freedom of movement as well as co-operative teaching are provided.

Non-grading and open education foster individual learning and often involve pupils working in groups. They also require them to be more responsible for their own learning than traditional methods do. Of necessity children in small schools have had to assume more responsibility for their own learning than their large school counterparts. When a teacher is responsible for three or more year-levels, it is obvious that he cannot teach all at the same time. While a lesson is being taught, those children for whom it is not intended work by themselves relatively free from direct teacher supervision. Grouping across grade lines in social studies and science and into larger groups, e.g. junior and senior

school, for activities in sport, music, art and drama have traditionally provided experience at working in groups. Teachers in small schools are used to dealing with pupils as individuals especially in one-teacher schools where, because of the smallness of enrolments, they are virtually forced to devise independent programmes. Re-organization of the curriculum, or at least sections of it, is one of the roles of the small school teacher.

In an open or non-graded situation, children of varying sizes, ages, abilities and the like would be working together and the advisability of this is frequently questioned in the large school environment. It is argued that larger children working in a group of predominantly smaller children may develop feelings of inferiority. Alternatively, the social immaturity of younger children working with a group of predominantly older children and the resultant harmful effect that this may have on them is also argued. Such potential problems do not loom as large in the small school as in its larger counterpart. Because of the small size of such schools, children of differing ages are used to seeing each other in the same classroom. They have experience at working together when different year-levels are combined for instruction and activities, and they must mix together in the playground so that they will have the necessary numbers to play team games. As well, because of the smallness of the communities in which the schools are located, children of varying ages are quite likely to mix freely and frequently at district social functions.

Compatibility of teachers and a similar conviction to the philosophy of non-grading or open education so that it may be implemented throughout the whole school appears more feasible in the small school rather than the large school. It is more likely that a school with two or three teachers would have total staff commitment than one with a number of teachers.

It is a reasonable assumption that there is less likelihood of teacher incompatibility in the small school than the large school. Where there are only two or three teachers, they are more likely to make an effort to "get on" together. Of necessity, they must interact, perhaps several times a day, as

colleagues are likely to be the only people with whom teachers may be able to discuss certain problems on a common ground. Teachers in small schools cannot afford the luxury of squabbling among themselves.

The major advantage that the large school has over the small school is that, in embarking on a non-graded or open approach, there are more likely to be larger numbers of teachers to share the early work-load of preparing and implementing the change.

It is with the preceding advantages in mind, and at the same time not forgetting the major disadvantage, that the multiple-progress plan is proffered. It is felt that it has a better chance of success in the small school than in the large school, though it is still applicable to the latter.

## 3. A MULTIPLE-PROGRESS PLAN

As Queensland education moves into the 'eighties, open education has lost a number of its firm supporters of the 'seventies. Part of the blame for this may be attributed to certain misconceptions, as in many instances, open education has been little understood. Misconceptions that are discredited in the literature include:

- an open-area or multiple-area school is necessary to practise open education;
- co-operative teaching is an essential part of open education;
- set syllabi cannot be a part of open education; and
- external discipline and extrinsic motivation do not have a place in open education.

Two misconceptions not given the same amount of space as those above, but which have had a negative effect on open education in Queensland are:

- the aims of open education are different from those of traditional education; and
- teachers should practise EITHER open education OR traditional education.

Open education is a type of school organization, not an alternative form of schooling. If one accepts that the major aim of primary schooling is literacy

same goal, the former is merely following a different path from the latter and in so doing, places a high priority on the individuality of pupils.

That teachers must either practise open education or teach traditionally is an unfortunate misconception. There is ample evidence in the literature, especially the "Times Educational Supplement" from 1970 onwards, which acknowledge that open education cannot be divorced from traditional teaching entirely. The relationship between the two is an "AND" one, not an "EITHER" - "OR" one. In practice, schools are likely to have a "mix" of traditional and open education, the proportions of the "mix" determining whether they are open or traditional.

It is with this "mix" in mind that the multiple-progress plan is offered with the addition of a third form of school organization, non-grading.

Looking towards the future, one may question the necessity of set curricula on the grounds that knowledge is constantly changing. However, pupils need certain knowledge now and in the immediate future to equip them for current living and current knowledge may well be the foundations for future understandings. As well, there are specific areas of knowledge that one assumes will remain constant, e.g. "two plus two equals four". Not all learning then can be left to pupil choice as there are times when they will need to be set in a definite direction. It is suggested that this applies to the basic subjects and that traditional teaching is most appropriate in this respect. Commenting on the Bennett Report,[1.] Entwhistle stated:

> "The findings suggest in unequivocal terms, that formal methods of teaching are associated with greater progress in the basic skills." [2.]

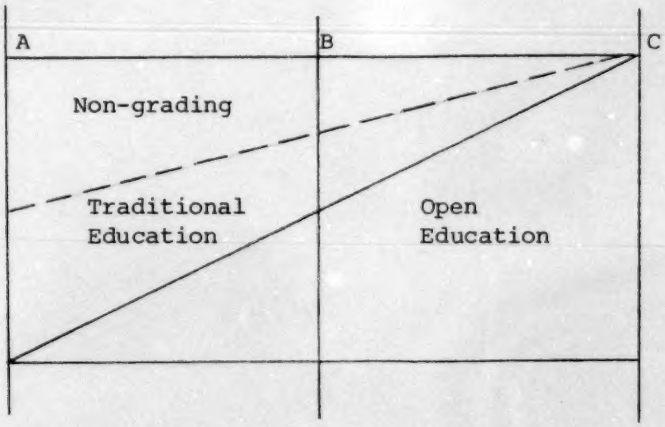
Relative to the basic subjects, knowledge at one level may depend upon mastery of certain knowledge at lower levels, e.g. in specific areas of mathematics, and so curricula are sequentially or spirally organized. Some direction is required and it is suggested that this may be done most effectively by employing non-grading.

Non-grading and open education have similarities, e.g. the elimination of grade labels and an emphasis on individual differences and continuous pupil progress, but there is one major point of departure - non-grading requires a set curriculum while open education imposes no such requirement.

There are differences between the graded and the non-graded curricula. In Queensland, for example, the graded curriculum is divided into seven segments, each taking one year to complete. The non-graded curriculum is divided into much smaller segments or levels. When a pupil demonstrates that he has mastered a particular level, he simply moves on to the next and so he continues in this manner. There are no time limits on pupil progress, nor is the pupil dependent upon others reaching the same level. Children returning to school after a vacation or an absence merely start again where they had left off previously.

In traditional as well as open approaches, pupils gain a deal of knowledge that is not basic or unchanging, or that is not sequential. Here it is suggested that an open approach would be most appropriate. In this way, pupils will be able to progress at their own rate and follow their own interests. They will not be dependent upon other pupils or a set curriculum and so their individuality will be better catered for.

The multiple-progress plan is illustrated in diagram form below.




The continuous lines are fixed while the dotted line is moveable. Schools that practise the multiple-progress plan would take up a position somewhere between A and C, but one would envisage not too far removed from B in either direction -

this depends upon the "mix" between open and traditional education. The position of the dotted line would depend upon the proportion of the core-curriculum that a particular school has decided to allocate to non-grading and the proportion that it has decided to allocate to traditional teaching.

4. COMMENT

Three practical limitations relative to the implementation of the multiple-progress plan are immediately apparent. These involve the amount of time and work in:

compiling a core-curriculum;

deciding the proportion of the core-curriculum that will be devoted to traditional teaching and the proportion that will be devoted to non-grading; and

dividing the non-graded areas into levels.

Overcoming the first two limitations does not appear as challenging as overcoming the third. Many mutual-aid groups composed of small school teachers have addressed themselves to the task of designing core-curricula for their schools, and the division of such curricula into non-graded and graded is essentially an extension of this process. On the other hand, a deal of work would be involved in "breaking down" the non-graded curricula into levels. This is a time consuming process and the only consolation is that this would only be necessary for a section of the total curriculum. However, it is suggested that because the small school teacher must work in two or more year levels at the same time, he is perhaps better equipped for this task than his larger school counterpart.

## 5. REFERENCES

1. Bennett, N. 1976. Teaching Styles and Pupil Progress, London: Open Books.

2. "The Courier Mail", 22 March, 1976.